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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 004246

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PRT ERBIL: KRG PESHMERGA MINISTER OBJECTS TO
FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3980

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 4059

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) This is a PRT Erbil cable. Omer Othman (known as Za'im Ali), the Kurdistan Regional Government's Minister of Peshmerga (KDP-Kurdistan Democratic Party) met Erbil IPA0 to clarify Peshmerga and party views on Kurdish-U.S. relations, the PKK, negotiations with Baghdad, and freedom of the press. Following meetings between KRG and central Iraqi government ministers, MNF-I, and US and UK diplomats, several media outlets carried a story from an unidentified Kurdish source stating that the strongest Kurdish demands had been accepted. This cable addresses Peshmerga views on internal KRG relations, press freedom, and media control.

[1](#)2. (SBU) When asked his views on media reports that U.S. and U.K. ambassadors agreed "the 'Peshmerga' forces will undertake to protect Iraq's Kurdistan region" in Al Hayah, Al Hurrah, Radio Sawa, and other media, Za'im Ali said he was very angry about the story. He agreed that it impedes progress on negotiations between the KRG and Baghdad on issues of Peshmerga and New Iraqi Army (NIA) roles. He said he received numerous calls from the media asking for his comment and he denied the story in each case. Za'im Ali, clearly unsettled by media pressure, asked what he should say, and decided to state that discussions are still ongoing and no agreements have been reached.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Za'im Ali, his deputy Anwar Othman, and General Sherwan all held the view that the KRG government should pressure the media to declare the source. They said they could shut down the papers or take them to court for printing this story. IPA0 Erbil commented that freedom of the press is not always comfortable, but that in a democracy the media have the legal right to print stories and protect sources. Za'im Ali and his colleagues, after further discussion, said that democracy has limits, which include embarrassing the government, and this story was

abusing the government's rights and therefore could not be allowed.

¶4. (SBU) Asked who might have planted the story, Za'im Ali rejected the possibility that it was in-house. He commented that Jabar Yawar, deputy to the KRG "Minister of Region for Peshmerga Affairs" Shaikh Jaafar, had made inappropriate comments before the Khanzad meeting. He asserted that Jabar and Shaikh Jaafar do not have the right to make statements. Asked what the motivation for the story might have been, Za'im Ali said "they are trying to back me into a corner." (COMMENT: Za'im Ali was openly perturbed by this issue, and the virulence of his condemnation of the media seemed to be fueled more by his suspicions of the source and the political manipulation it implied than real frustration with the story itself which simply reflected views he himself had expressed at the meeting. END COMMENT)

Speckhard